sarah:

these are the text parts of World Wide Web pages on the history of Point and a history of Point publications.

mike
7/12/95

Point History: The Text Part of a World Wide Web File

Verbal snapshots from the last quarter century

Point is the not-for-profit umbrella providing legal corporate shelter for Whole Earth's operations and projects.

Point has also functioned frequently as an engine for the redistribution of wealth. When Whole Earth publications have made money, Point has been the "anti-foundation" for sharing those profits. When Whole Earth publications have gone to readers, friends and foundations for support, Point has served as the conduit for tax-deductible gifts and grants.

In between, or under a shifting set of guises (Whole Earth Institute, Further Institute), it's hatched a few plots of its own. Some Point moments, in the words in which they were described at the time:

A Point Birth Tale

The Whole Earth Catalog Demise Party

(As told by Stewart Brand in the Whole Earth Epilog, 1974. For a more complete rendering, see Michael Phillips' The Seven Laws of Money, reviewed on p. 305 of The Millennium Whole Earth Catalog.

In June 1971, we had the Demise Party celebrating the self-termination of The Whole Earth Catalog, and all in all it was a rout. 1500 people showed up. . . . And then at midnight Scott Beach announced from the stage that these two hundred $100 dollar bills, yes, $20,000, were now the property of the party-goers, just as soon as they could decide what to do with them.

"Flush them down the toilet!" No, don't!" "Give it to the Indians!" "Bangladesh!" "Our commune needs a pump or we'll all get hepatitis!" And so on. The debate lasted till 9 a.m. the next morning, when a dozen remaining hardcore turned the remaining $15,000 ($5,000 had been distributed to the crowd at one wild point) over to Fred Moore, dishwasher. Fred later gathered people for other group decidings over what to do with the money that worked out damn well.

Point is Born

(Stewart again, from CoEvolution Quarterly) No. 2, Summer, 1974). POINT was set up -- with Last Whole Earth Catalog income -- to be an anti-foundation. Active rather than passive (directors find projects, not vice versa). Individual rather than committee (directors each have $55,000/year -- when there's money -- to spend on their own). Interested in originality. Preferring to give to individuals. Spend the capital and the interest. Three-year kick-out for all directors. Major criterion of successful grant: enjoyment.

(Whole Earth Epilog, see above) We funded quickly and without fuss, usually preferring to do without proposals and such. We held board meetings on salmon boats at sea, in tipis, in Glide's sex room, at the Black Panther school in Oakland. And our grants were maybe no worse than other people's. . . . The main lesson I learned was: it's not enough to give money to someone who's very good. They must also be in the grip of an overwhelming idea which is very good. Otherwise, a hideous paralysis will take them over and, in addition, freeze your friendship.

[Point awarded $361,024 and $282,517 in its first two seasons, then went into debt itself and borrowed money to print The Whole Earth Epilog. A list of grantees can be found in CoEvolution Quarterly No. 2, Summer, 1974.]

Whole Earth Jamboree, August 26-28, 1978

Whole Earth celebrated its first ten years with a weekend festival for 8,000 or so friends in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area just north of San Francisco. New Games, booths, an encampment for Whole Earth veterans, speeches -- limited by Stewart's fiat to five minutes each -- by 60 luminaries. Reflecting about two months later on the event and the obstacles thrown up by so-called "environmentalists," Stewart Brand concluded (CQ No. 20; winter, 1978):

The idea of the 5-minute speeches at the Jamboree was somewhat strange, and it worked fine. The speakers adapted gracefully, said interesting things, and the audience stayed large through less interesting talks and lesser known speakers because of the format. So that was okay, and the people to work with were outstanding, the best ever, and the event went nicely.

But I'm discontent with the Jamboree. . . .The Jamboree was not worth fighting for. It wasn't an idea, it was a reflex based on the non-event of Ten Years. Ten Years doesn't have anything to do with anything. It's an excuse. Why do we need excuses?

What lessons do I draw from the Jamboree battle and the clarifying exercise of writing it all up? I will do no more public events no matter how nice. A project would have to be strange enough to have no organized set of ideological allies to try to destroy it, because once they try they succeed, even if they fail.

Meanwhile, also in CQ No. 20, Anne Herbert (who had been negative about the event from the beginning) wrote,

You can imagine my surprise at finding out two months later that I now feel negative about the Jamboree for a whole new reason. I think it was such a good thing that it is almost criminal to do it only once. This does not change the fact that if Stewart announced he was going to do another Jamboree, I would immediately apply for a job with Reader's Digest. But I really believe that the kind of good feeling that was there present was designed to happen on some kind of continuing and regular basis.

The feeling at the Jamboree wasn't a high (that's why some people found it a let down), but was very strong pleasant. It was in fact a neighborhood feeling -- a relaxation and ease among a community that had temporarily become a community. . . . I was surprised, and almost shocked, to find a neighborhood I liked at the Jamboree since I've always thought CQ readers were pure and more intense and more irritable than I. I wasn't at all sure that I'd like to be around a bunch of them for two days.

It turned out that the CQ people who write to the office may often be more like unfun true believers than my friends but the people at the Jamboree stunned me their wonderfulness, and made me wish we could have hung out together longer, or more frequently.

<u>Hackers' Conference: 1984</u>

Stewart Brand, Whole Earth Review No. 46, May, 1985:

I think hackers -- dedicated, innovative computer programmers -- are the most interesting and effective body of intellectuals since the framers of the U.S. Constitution.

No other group that I know of has set out to liberate a technology and succeeded. They not only did so against the active disinterest of corporate America, their successes forced corporate America to adopt their style in the end. In reorganizing the Information Age around the individual, via personal computers, the hackers may well have saved the American economy. High tech is now something that mass consumers do, rather than just have done to them, and that's a hot item in the world. . . .

Some of the shyer people you'll ever meet, hackers are also some of the funniest. The standard memory of the Hackers' Conference is of three days and two long nights of nonstop hilarity. These supposed lone wolves, proud artistes, in fact collaborate with glee. . . .

It was set up as an invitational conference, no featured speakers, minimal budget: all participants paid the same $90 for food and lodging and conference no matter how much or how little they used.

Knowing we had facilities for 150, over 400 hackers were invited in three waves. That became a saga of its own -- identifying the right 400, getting current addresses and phones of a slippery crowd, getting them to respond (many ignore mail and phone). But once they were on the scene, they were the world's easiest group to work with. If anything went wrong, 1) they didn't care, 2) they could fix it. Staff, volunteers, participants, and press (20 knowledgeable computer reporters were invited) blended into one energetic population.

<u>The WELL: 1985</u>

Stewart Brand: Whole Earth Review No. 47, July, 1985:

Regional computer networks like The WELL (it stands for, no snickering, Whole Earth Lectronic Link) are just barely existent now - there's one in Ann Arbor, Michigan, one in Colorado Springs, one coming in Toronto, that's all - but I'll wager they're common in metropolitan areas by this time next year. They are such odd and addicting facilities. It's as if the coffee house, the bookstore, and the telephone had all been invented and made into one starkly new

communication medium. Take the rampant enthusiasm you find on the national networks like CompuServe and The Source, the populist expertise of local computer user groups, and the wild wooliness of bulletin board systems, then add the no-nonsense zeal of a multitude of small businesses looking for the cheapest/best tool for their regional communications, blend, and duck. . . .

Does all this portent more computer stuff in the Whole Earth Review? I doubt it; better computer stuff, maybe, but in the magazine as in life, computers are blending in with other tools, some traditional, some even more glitzy-popular like VCRs and video disks, some providing new advantage to small business, like laser printers. None too soon. The mind WAS running away from the body.

Cyberthon: October 6-7, 1990

Richard Kadrey, Whole Earth Review No. 70, Spring, 1991

The Whole Earth Institute built a ten-foot-high maze in the main soundstage of Colossal Pictures in San Francisco, transforming the place into "Cyberthon," a 24-hour virtual-reality marathon, conference, fair, exposition and running debate. . . .

After twenty-four straight hours, most Cyberthoners were running on sugar, caffeine and pure adrenaline. Personal realities were shifting without the aid of machines. When it was over, Cyberthon was being called everything from "the Acid Test of the Nineties" to "Nerdstock." It was a preview of an embryonic technology that promises to turn what we normally call "reality" inside out. Cyberthon participants got the answer to the question, "Where is virtual reality right now?" but better yet, they came away with new questions, like "How do we define reality when we can each shape our own?," "Who will control VR technology?," and "What happens to transportation, telecommunications and the human body when you can direct whole areas of your life from inside your computer?"

Most of these issues from which these excerpts were taken are available from Point Foundation, 27 Gate Five Road, Sausalito, CA 94965, 415/332-1716.

A very small number of copies of No. 2 are available for $50 postpaid. Nos. 20, 46, 47 and 70 are available for $10 postpaid each. No. 20 contains the texts of most of the five-minute Whole Earth

Jamboree speeches. No. 46 includes a transcript of one morning's discussion/debate (30 voices) from the Hackers' Conference.

POINT FOUNDATION PUBLICATIONS

Publications came before Point. They remain at the heart of its mission. Herewith, a short history:

1968: The Whole Earth Catalog

The original Whole Earth Catalog (10 3/4," x 14 1/2," first printing, 1,000 copies) is published under the auspices of Portola Institute.

Editor Stewart Brand defines its purpose: "We are as gods and might as well get good at it. So far remotely done power and glory -- as via government, big business, formal education, church -- has succeeded to the point where gross defects obscure actual gains. In response to this dilemma and to these gains a realm of intimate, personal power is developing -- power of the individual to conduct his own education, find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is interested. Tools that aid this process are sought and promoted by The Whole Earth Catalog."

The book's domains include Whole Systems, Shelter and Land Use, Community, Communications, Industry and Craft, Nomadics, and Learning.

1969: The Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalog

The Supplement begins life as "The Difficult But Possible Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalog," bridging the spaces between Catalog publications.

1971: The Last Whole Earth Catalog

In 1969, Stewart Brand writes, "Plans change, but at this writing our plan is to cease publication of The Whole Earth Catalog in the Spring of 1971. . . . If by that time there aren't people and ideas around doing a better job than us, then we'll have failed: we won't have replaced ourselves. Most likely though we'll be obsolescent and in the way, and our departure will be the occasion for sighs of relief and a party." The Last Whole Earth Catalog is born. Point Foundation is founded to disburse the accumulated funds. The party is held; Stewart gives the crowd $20,000 and tells them to figure out what to

do with it. In 1972 The Last Whole Earth Catalog wins the National Book Award. Sales head toward two million.

1973: The Updated Last Whole Earth Catalog

No one else has yet moved into the niche, and Point resumes publication.

1974: CoEvolution Quarterly

A new reader-supported journal replaces the Supplements as the regular update to the Whole Earth Catalog. CQ adds long articles on unorthodox subjects to Catalog-style reviews

1974: The Whole Earth Epilog

In the face of more new information than another update can accommodate, Point brings out "Volume Two." Its first page (p. 449) features a restated purpose:

"We are as gods, and may as well get good at it. This might include losing the pride that went before the fall we are in the process of taking. Rolling with such a fall is our present lesson -- learning whatever resilience, ingenuity, basic skills, and enthused detachment that survival requires. And learning perhaps to reverence some Gods who are not as us."

1976: World Biogeographical Provinces Map

Point issues a graphical bioregionalist manifesto: the self-portrait the earth might paint.

Point publishes two books, a serious consideration and critique of proposals for living in space and a look at applied state-of-the-art technology, circa 1978.

1980: The Next Whole Earth Catalog

Point's heftiest endeavor ever at 608 pages, five pounds, and 2,700 items, followed a year later by a 3,907-item second edition. The

effort to produce the behemoth displaces work on CQ Number 27, and 24,000 subscribers receive the huge book as their fall issue.

1984: The Whole Earth Software Catalog 1.0; the Whole Earth Software Review; the Whole Earth Review

Point attempts paper-published software reviewing. The book and quarterly are critical successes, but unable to keep up with the pace of software development. After three issues, The Whole Earth Software Review is absorbed into CQ to become The Whole Earth Review.

1986: The Essential Whole Earth Catalog and News That Stayed News

J. Baldwin, edits the chunky (416 pages, 8 1/2" x 11") compilation of the best of 18 years of Catalog publishing. With development supported by Apple Computer, Inc., Point and Broderbund Software issue EWEC two years later as a Hyper Card CD-ROM, The Electronic Whole Earth Catalog. Music reviews with samples, birding fieldbooks with birdcalls. The technology succeeds, but too few people own CD-ROM players to support the $153 product.

Art Kleiner and Stewart Brand edit News That Stayed News: Ten Years of CoEvolution Quarterly, an anthology of CQ's greatest hits.

1988: Signal: Communication Tools for the Information Age; The Fringes of Reason: A Field Guide to New Age Frontiers, Unusual Beliefs and Eccentric Sciences

After nearly 20 years of light tables, paste-up, wax and razor blades, Point moves into desktop publishing with Signal, edited by Kevin Kelly and The Fringes of Reason, edited by Ted Schultz.

1990: Whole Earth Ecolog

Editor J. Baldwin takes the Whole Earth Catalog back to its classic 10 3/4" x 14 1/2" size with a catalog devoted wholly to environmental and ecological matters.

1991: Helping Nature Heal

Edited by Richard Nilsen, HNH combines the usual reviews of tools and resources with extended vignettes of soul-restoration by means of Earth-restoration.

1994: The Millennium Whole Earth Catalog

Editor Howard Rheingold and the crew offer access to tools and ideas for the twenty-first century in a new, comprehensive tour of 14 domains including, for the first time, Biodiversity, Sustainability, Sex, Family and Taming Technology.

"Some people who are taking the world in their hands are out in the rainforests," says editor Rheingold. "Many world-changers are in cities and suburbs. Others are in cyberspace. Here are the field reports, recommendations, and reviews from the ethnobotanists in the Amazon and the cybernauts of the Internet."

The Millennium Whole Earth Catalog Home Page includes a table of contents, sample pages from each of the 14 domains, and information on ordering electronically and by phone.